

# PEACE CONFERENCE IN PARIS AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH GERMANY IN 1919<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

The present study deals with the initial stage of the Versailles Peace Conference. In the first phase of the conference, in addition to the Covenant of the League of Nations, efforts were made to conclude an agreement with Germany. The negotiation process has been extremely turbulent. German officials sought to make a peace that fully respected Wilson's points, which was no longer possible at the time. The presented study maps the state of negotiations and compares the final form of the Versailles Peace Treaty with the position of Germany and the so-called Entente Powers. It also pays attention to the impact of the Treaty of Versailles on the creation of new state borders in Central Europe.

## **Keywords**

*Versailles Peace Conference, Peace Treatys from Paris, creation of borders in Central Europe in 1918, negotiations in Paris Peace Conference, End of the First World War*

Although the armistice after the Great War had been signed on 11 November 1918, the Peace Conference itself did not formally begin until 18 January 1919. There were several reasons for that time shift. The UK elections and Lloyd George's attempt to retain his position as the Prime Minister was the first of them. Another reason was US President Woodrow Wilson's effort to travel to Europe and attend the planned Peace Conference in person. In addition to the aforementioned US and UK officials, Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister also played an important role. It was these three politicians who largely determined the nature of the negotiations. How-

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ever, Russia as one of the former allies of the Treaty was absent from the Conference. The Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between Russia and the Central Powers in 1918 excluded Bolshevik Russia from the Alliance. Russia's political character after the Bolshevik revolution was perhaps the biggest obstacle to their joining the negotiations in Paris.

A total of thirty-two states and about two hundred plenipotentiaries attended the Peace Conference. The Conference had the character of an allied conference. The defeated countries were not represented, but their representatives were invited in the final stage of the adoption of peace treaties. The actors participating at the conference dispositioned themselves by power into powers with general interests and smaller states with limited interests. The participating countries were classified into four categories:

1. Great Powers with general interests – the USA, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Japan.
2. Countries engaged in the war having interests of a partial nature, e.g. Belgium, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, Poland, and China. They only attended the meetings that concerned them.
3. Countries that severed diplomatic relations with the Central Powers, e.g. Peru and Bolivia. They attended only the meetings that concerned them.
4. Neutral states or those being in the stage of establishment – these were only admitted to meetings if invited by one of the Great Powers.

The number of delegates who could take part in the negotiations was also determined for each country. The Great Powers had 5 authorised delegates each. Belgium, Brazil, and Serbia could send three delegates. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Thailand, the British Commonwealth of Nations (Australia, South Africa, and Canada), and India could send two delegates each. Other countries could only send one delegate. The total number of delegates in the relevant stages of the Conference approached a thousand. However, the decision-making on the most important issues as well as the prioritisation of the addressed issues remained in the hands of the Great Powers.

The dispositioning of the states by their power and the individual ideas on peaceful arrangement among the representatives of the Great Powers defined the main topics of the Conference, besides the main contentions. The Peace Conference agenda was being shaped in the process and was

conditioned by the development of the situation in Europe, by the current conflicts among the states, by the demands of nationalities and, to a large extent, by the demands of the victorious Treaty Powers. Specifically, the Conference was to discuss the issue of the formation of the League of Nations, the German and Italian issues, as well as the issues of new states, emerging borders, or redistribution of the former colonial territories.<sup>2</sup>

The so-called *Council of Four* was the supreme body of the Conference<sup>3</sup> which comprised of the representatives of the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Italy. Independently of that, the so-called *Triumvirate* composed of Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Wilson was created – they were the key actors in the Conference. Other bodies of the Conference included the *Supreme Military Council* that decided on military issues, the *Supreme Economic Council* that served as an advisory body for issues related to the economy and also took care of e.g. supplying the areas that suffered from the greatest shortages of food and clothing after the war. Individual committees and commissions also served as the main bodies which comprised of experts in the relevant branches of science, they were responsible for preparing drafts and subsequently submitting them for decision to the Supreme Council. We also include *the Peace Conference plenary sessions* among the main bodies of the Conference. Their role was to familiarise themselves with the drafted motions concerning the League of Nations and the peace treaties that had previously been approved by the Supreme Council of the Conference.<sup>4</sup>

At the Paris Peace Conference, a two-pronged approach was used to address the issues. In the first place, demarcation of problematic territorial boundaries was left to the selected experts. They were commissioned to assess the affiliation of the area concerned in terms of its geography or history with an emphasis laid on accurate statistics and specific attitudes of the local population. The second principle of the decision-making was the subsequent plebiscite, i.e. popular secret ballot under the supervision of an international body.<sup>5</sup> We consider the application of both of the above prin-

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2 PROCHÁZKA, Rudolf: *Likvidace války 1919*. Praha, Orbis, 1935, 24-26, 28-43.

3 The original Council of Ten (two representatives of the USA, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan) was first replaced by the Council of Five (comprising only the heads of delegations of the 5 powers) and later by the Council of Four which, at one point, became the so-called Triumvirate.

4 HOUDEK, Fedor: *Vznik hranic Slovenska*. Bratislava, Prúdy, 1931, 289.

5 DEJMEK, Jindřich a kol.: *Zrod nové Evropy. Versailles, Saint Germain, Trianon a dotváření*

ciples as an effort to partition Europe as fairly and sustainably as possible after World War I. As a matter of fact, no previous peace conference<sup>6</sup> had to address so many problematic issues together and subject them to such a thorough analysis.<sup>7</sup>

The future organisation of Germany – a country that was considered one of the villains of the war – was one of the fundamental issues that the Conference had to address. By signing the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918, Germany itself considered the issue of the organisation of Eastern Europe to be resolved. Peace with Soviet Russia was beneficial for the Germans. However, the course of the last stage of the Great War destroyed Berlin's ideas on the outcome of the war. The way out of the unfavourable situation in which Wilhelm's Germany found itself was in President Wilson's well-known 14 Points the general wording of which often allowed for different interpretations and gave Germany a relatively wide margin of manoeuvre in peace negotiations. In particular, the first five points could be used to weaken the superpower position of the United Kingdom and France.<sup>8</sup>

The Government Statement of Prince Maximilian von Baden, the last Chancellor of Imperial Germany, dated 5 October 1918, clarified the German war objectives as, in a sense, the opposite to Wilson's Memorandum. The Chancellor of the Reich formulated the following points:

1. It was also in Germany's interest to conclude a special agreement that excluded the formation of both defensive and offensive associations and ensured open diplomacy under the control of public opinion and nations.
2. Germany was to agree to free navigation at sea in times of peace and war, so that the closure of the seas would never again become an instrument for the starvation of nations.

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*poválečného mírového systému*. Praha: Historický ústav AV ČR 2011, 23-24. BOEMEKE, Manfred–FELDMAN, Gerald–GLASER, Elisabeth (eds.): *The Treaty of Versailles. A Reassessment after 75 Years*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 469.

6 On the beginnings of diplomacy, see: VRANA, Vladimír: *Rímska diplomacia na sklonku republiky*. In: VLADÁR, Vojtech (ed.): *Rímsko-kánonické východiská slovenského a európskeho verejného práva: zborník z konferencie Katedry rímskeho a cirkevného práva*. Prague, Leges, 2020, 39-51.

7 MACMILLAN, Margaret Olwen: *Mírotvorci: pařížská konference 1919*. Praha, Academia, 2004, 18.

8 PROKŠ, Petr: *Vítězové a poražení. Střední Evropa v politických plánech velmocí za Velké války a na mírové konferenci v Paříži (1914-1918/1919-1920)*. Prague, Naše vojsko, 2016, 174.

3. Germany wanted to have the same rights and no advantages in trade with other nations because it was these advantages that caused discrepancies among the nations to date.
4. Germany did not reject the equal and balanced disarmament of all the countries, including its neighbours, on land, at sea, and in the air.
5. The colonial issue had to be addressed in the light of the economic interests of the peoples of Europe based on efforts to restore ownership of the colony according to the pre-war situation.
6. Withdrawal from the occupied Russian territory and freedom for Russia should exclusively apply to territories originally inhabited by Russians, while other peoples and territories of the former Tsarist Empire, such as the Poles and Lithuanians, the Baltic and the Caucasian peoples or Finland and Ukraine, were free to decide on their destiny with the exclusion of demagogic or military terror. Their freedom of self-determination had to be ensured under international supervision while re-establishing the right of each region to reunite with new Russia in the future.
7. Germany agreed to restore the sovereignty and integrity of Belgium.
8. Germany did not want to usurp any territory belonging to France and was ready to negotiate Alsace-Lorraine with its enemies. However, Germany rejected President Wilson's view that the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany in 1871 was unjust because long before that it had been France that had forcibly severed Alsace-Lorraine from Germany, having made the territory a bone of contention in Europe. Therefore, its destiny had to be resolved not according to the old lawlessness, but according to historical law under which the population of Alsace-Lorraine could not be subjugated to military seizure by the German army but neither to ruthless French chauvinism, and its future must be decided accordingly.
9. and 10) Regulation of the internal relations of Austria-Hungary and settlement with Italy was a matter of our faithful ally the interests of which were as close to our hearts as our own.
10. The same position applied to Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro.
11. Similarly, the same principles had to apply to Turkey as to all countries made up of diverse nations. Switzerland as the homeland of three different ethnicities offered evidence of the possibility of resolving such national issues.

12. Germany agreed with Poland's declaration of independence, but the vital interests of Allied Austria-Hungary had to be taken into account, as well as the safeguarding of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Poland.
13. Also, the principles of the envisaged union of nations for securing peace had to apply to all the existing enemies who, after the end of the war, plan to wage an economic war against Germany, which sought the same opportunities for commercial activity as all the enemy countries did. Otherwise, proposals to establish a similar union of nations would be a common-place phrase because in reality it would become a commercial hostile league against Germany and the war would continue by other means.<sup>9</sup>

Maximilian von Baden, the Chancellor of the Reich, sent President Wilson a request for peace on 3 October 1918 asking him to take over the restoration of peace and inform all the war-leading countries of the German offer. In his answer of 8 October 1918, Wilson posed Germany the following questions:

1. Whether it was willing to accept his peace programme of January 1918.
2. Whether it would leave all of the occupied territories.
3. Whether the Chancellor of the Reich was only acting on behalf of those who had waged the war so far.

Maximilian von Baden announced the acceptance of all the US demands on 12 October 1918. Wilson responded with a note of 14 October 1918 in which he demanded unconditional submission to his conditions, leaving from the occupied territories, making of a ceasefire, ending the submarine war, and removing the personalities who violated international treaties and started the war, especially the resignation of Emperor Wilhelm II. Otherwise, he refused to negotiate peace.<sup>10</sup>

Berlin accepted the US conditions on 20 October 1918 with the assurance that it was ready for fundamental changes to the German constitutional system of the time. It is only understandable that the Emperor in particular was surprised by radical US demands leading to the abolition of the monarchy; therefore German diplomacy began to squirm. Wilhelm II as monarch repeatedly promised to advocate the change of the constitution-

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9 CHICKERING, Roger: *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914 – 1918*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 205.

10 KŘÍŽEK, Jaroslav: *První světová válka*. Prague, Naše vojsko, 1968, 258.

al system. The response, however, was Wilson's third note of 23 October 1918, in which the US President demanded the unconditional surrender of Germany, abdication of the Emperor, and abolition of the monarchy as a precondition for making the peace. Berlin accepted these demands on 27 October 1918, but relied on the British and the French in particular to respect Wilson's original programme when negotiating peace.<sup>11</sup>

The peace made on 11 November 1918 was preceded by a series of uprisings in the German Army. Dissatisfaction of the German public and radicalisation of the country's political life compelled the resignation of the Emperor just two days before making the peace in Compi gne. Power in the country was taken over by the Council of People's Deputies headed by Friedrich Ebert, Germany's future first President. The conditions imposed on defeated Germany on 11 November 1918 were devastating. These may be summarised in several groups:

1. Conditions on the Western Front: Cessation of military operations within six hours of the signing of the armistice; immediate evacuation of troops from the occupied territories of Belgium, France, and Alsace-Lorraine; releasing the prisoners of war; surrendering a specified number of heavy military equipment; evacuating the German Army from the left bank of the Rhine which would be occupied by the troops of the Treaty, while the cost of their stay was to be borne by Germany.
2. Conditions on the Eastern Front: All of the German troops were to leave the territory of Russia, Romania, and Turkey and withdraw beyond the borders of Germany of 1 August 1914; the German Government was expected to annul the Peace Treaty of Bucharest and the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; allied troops would be given free passage through Germany east to Gdansk and the Vistula.
3. Conditions in Africa: Evacuation of German troops from East Africa within one month at the latest.
4. Conditions at sea: Immediate cessation of hostilities at sea and notification of the exact whereabouts of German warships; all the German submarines were considered to be captured vessels and were required to dock of the nearest port belonging to the Treaty within 14 days; Germany was obliged to hand over naval ships to the Allies and was obliged to destroy 50 new vessels; Germany was obliged to return the captured merchant ships to the Allies.

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11 VON BADEN, Max: *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*. Stuttgart, Ernst Klett, 1968, 602.

5. Conditions in the air: all of the German military aircraft was to withdraw to German airports and remain on the ground.
6. Other conditions: The Allies would maintain the existing blockade of Germany; German merchant ships would be confiscated; the Allies would supply Germany with necessities to the extent necessary; Germany undertook to pay war compensation to the Allies and neutral states.

The conditions set in this way had a very grave impact on Germany's internal life and its international standing.<sup>12</sup>

In order to achieve the best possible position for Germany at the Paris Peace Conference, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was removed from his office in Germany. On 18 December 1918, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, a career diplomat who was more acceptable to the Allies, was appointed to the office. The new German head of diplomacy emphasised that the German Government accepted the US President Wilson's programme, but the territorial demands of the enemy (especially those of Poland) were not fair and were in direct conflict with Wilson's programme. Therefore, they rejected these demands as they were potentially leading to another war in Europe. The foreign policy programme of the new German Minister of Foreign Affairs was also taken over by the new social democratic government of the Weimar Republic.<sup>13</sup>

At the Peace Conference, disputes were meanwhile taking place among moderate Americans, pragmatic British, 'revanchist' French and ambitious Italians over the conditions of a peace treaty with Germany. At one point, it seemed that the whole Conference would end in failure (what they had hoped for in Germany). German diplomats relied on the unity of the victorious countries falling apart, that the Americans and the British would oppose the exaggerated claims of the French. Germany would join the 'Anglo-Saxons' in such a situation and, together with them, strike back France's claims. The British Prime Minister David Lloyd George therefore submitted to the other members of the Council of Four on 24 March 1919 a funda-

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12 PROKŠ, Petr: *První světová válka a velmocenské plány císařského Německa (1914- 1918)*. In: HÁJEK, Jan – KOCIAN, Jiří – ZÍTKO, Milan (eds.): *Fragmenty dějin. Sborník prací k šedesátinám Jana Gebharta*. Prague, Institute of History of the AS CR, 2006, 425.

13 SCHWABE, Klaus: *Deutsche Revolution und Wilson-Frieden. Die amerikanische und deutsche Friedensstrategie zwischen Ideologie und Machenpolitik 1918/1919*. Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 1971, 92.

mental Memorandum on the need for a sensible approach in creating the conditions of a peace treaty to ensure long-term peace. In his opinion, colonies could be taken away from Germany or its army could be reduced – this was irrelevant. If Berlin got the impression that it was treated unfairly during the peace negotiations, it would find a way to avenge its enemies.<sup>14</sup> Twenty years later, it became clear that the British Prime Minister was an excellent prophet.

The British Prime Minister's Memorandum further emphasised that the Peace Conference must not leave behind a "pernicious legacy" by placing millions of Germans, Hungarians and other minorities under foreign rule. It must not incite revolutionary forces to ignite whole Europe. And above all – the Conference must not put Germany's back to the wall, because a threat would arise that it will unite with the Bolsheviks and provide its intellectual and organisational skills to revolutionary fanatics whose dream is to conquer the world for Bolshevism by armed forces. The Four Great Powers must therefore also put limits on building the warships and the expansion of armies only accepting Germany into the League of Nations when it is sufficiently stable. The League of Nations will protect international law and freedom throughout the world. In return for their moderation, London expected a high-levelled accommodating approach from Berlin. However, the Germans did not manifest this for a very long time. It was realistically possible to expect the occupation of the whole of Germany as requested by the French in particular.<sup>15</sup>

At the request of the Allies, the official German delegation headed by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs arrived in Paris on 17 April 1919 to whom the Allies officially presented the conditions of the Peace Treaty on 7 May 1919. Brockdorf-Rantzau communicated the views of the German delegation to the Allies as soon as two days later. After a preliminary review of the draft treaty, the German delegation came to the conclusion that the decisive points of the peace conditions were contrary to the principles of the rule of law, therefore the German nation would not accede to them. In the opinion of the German delegation, the draft Peace Treaty contained requirements that were unacceptable to any nation, and many of them were unattainable in the opinion of German experts. The German delegation

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14 GRAEBNER, Norman–BENNETT, Edward (eds.): *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: The Failure of Wilsonian Vision*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 76.

15 SCHELLE, Karel: *Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920) and its influence*. Brno, NOVOPRESS, 24.

therefore decided to draw up and submit to the Allies their own comments on the draft Peace Treaty. This happened on 29 May 1919.

In terms of its own counter-proposal, Germany was aware that it had to make sacrifices in order to gain peace. On the other hand, there were certain limits that it could not cross. Therefore, Germany submitted the following proposals:

1. Proposal for its own disarmament with a reduction in the number of its army to 100,000 soldiers. Germany was also willing to give up those battleships that its enemies had left to it. However, it expected admission to the League of Nations as an equal member in return.
2. On territorial issues, Germany accepted the US President Wilson's programme.
3. Germany was willing to pay war compensations up to the amount of 100 billion gold marks.
4. Germany was ready to provide its own economic power to rebuild the devastated areas of Belgium and northern France.
5. Germany was to provide the tonnage of its merchant navy to the enemy as part of war compensations.
6. Germany offered its own river vessels as a replacement for the destroyed river vessels of Belgium and France.
7. According to Germany, fulfilment of its compensation obligations would be accelerated if it granted creditors shares in its own industry, in particular in coal mines.
8. Germany would apply social welfare policy and provide social security to its workers.
9. Germany demanded a neutral assessment of guilt for the outbreak of the war and for the war damage caused.<sup>16</sup>

These German 9 points were followed by a relatively large-scale counter-proposal by the German Government to the conditions of peace, the first part of which contained general conditions. These can be summarised in three areas:

1. Legal grounds for peace negotiations: The German Government considered President Wilson's well-known 14 Points of January 1918 as the ground for negotiations. The Armistice Treaty of 11 November 1918 in

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16 COHRS, Patrick: *The Unfinished Peace after World War I. America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919-1932*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 52.

effect guaranteed Germany that President Wilson's 14 Points would exclusively serve as the basis for concluding the peace treaty and no other conditions of allied governments would be supported by the US President. Germany signed ceasefire only on the basis of this guarantee. The Allies also adopted President Wilson's 14 Points as the ground for the subsequent peace. Both parties solemnly committed to that. It follows that Germany was entitled to these conditions of peace. If the Allies had violated them, it would have been a violation of international law.

2. The conflict between the draft Peace Treaty and the agreed legal grounds and previous guarantees of the statesmen of the enemy: The statesmen of the enemy repeatedly stated during the war that they were not waging war against the German nation. They rejected violence against it and guaranteed it a fair peace. Membership in the emerging League of Nations was promised by the representatives of the Treaty to all, both winners and losers. They repeatedly claimed that even Germany was entitled to that membership, which therefore had the same rights as the victorious Allies. However, on the other hand, the enemies tried to destroy Germany's national existence in violation of international law. The principle of self-determination of nations declared by the Allies had to apply also to Germans and the rights and freedoms of Germany had to be guaranteed.
3. Conclusion: The draft Peace Treaty submitted to the German Government was in sharp conflict with the already agreed principles of establishing a lasting and legal peace. It threatened the territorial integrity of Germany, meant oppression of German ethnicity and complete destruction of the economic life in Germany in the future.

The German proposal itself was the second part of the proposal. It can be divided into the following points:

1. League of Nations. Only the establishment of the League of Nations on the basis of equality of both large and small states could guarantee lasting world peace and a general reduction in armaments. Therefore, Germany also had to become its equal member.
2. The range of territorial issues in the counter-proposal was relatively extensive, in accordance with the following points:  
*The right of the nations to self-determination.* No territory was to be torn away from Germany without the consent of its inhabitants. Germany

was to agree to safeguard all the rights of national minorities within the League of Nations. It was unacceptable that the self-determination of nations should be to the detriment of Germany's needs, in particular the desire of the German population to join the territory of the German Reich.

*Belgium.* The draft Peace Treaty required Germany to recognise the neutrality of Belgium. However, Germany was to refuse to cede the areas of Moresnet, Eupen, and Malmünd to Belgium which had never belonged to Belgium and were home to the "Prussian Walloons". Their rights also had to be guaranteed.

*Luxembourg.* Economically and politically, it should continue to be part of the customs union with Germany.

*Saarland.* Germany considered the secession of the Saar to France's economic interests to be an illegal solution and an infringement of the rights of its German-speaking population.

*Alsace-Lorraine.* It was largely an age-old part of the old German Reich. Its future was to be decided by the local population. There were three possible options – to join France; annexation to the German Reich in the form of a free state; complete independence, in particular the possibility of making an economic association with neighbours.

*German Austria.* Its population had been closely associated with the German "tribal country" through its history and culture for almost a thousand years. Therefore, Germany could not commit itself to the obligation to oppose the desire of its German brothers in Austria to reunite with Germany in accordance with the right of nations to self-determination.

*Eastern issue:*

*Upper Silesia.* It was a constitutional, territorial and economic part of the German Reich, which could not exist without it. Poland, on the other hand, did not need it.

*Poznan.* A large German population lived here. Therefore, any solution, regardless of national conditions, was unacceptable, only in terms of strategic preparations for a possible future attack on the German territory, especially when future relations between Germany and Poland would be regulated within the League of Nations.

*West Prussia.* This was an old German territory to which the Order of the Teutonic Knights had already granted its German character. Therefore, it could not be torn away from Germany.

*Gdansk.* As a free city, it had to continue to be economically and by transport connected to the German Reich.

*East Prussia.* One and a half million Germans lived here, so Germany could never agree to its territorial and economic secession to Poland.

*Memel.* From historical, linguistic, national, and religious points of view, the German Government rejected the secession of this area as the border of East Prussia from Germany.

*Schleswig.* Its future was to be determined by a linguistic point of view and the right of nations to self-determination, especially in the southern regions.

*Helgoland.* It had to stay fortified in the interests of the island's population, free navigation at sea, fishing, and coastal protection to fishing ports.

*Colonies.* Germany would continue to use its colonies as markets for its own industry and source of raw materials, as well as settlement areas for its population surpluses. Germany intended to resolve the colonial issue in the spirit of President Wilson's points by agreement with the local population.

*Jiao Zhou.* Germany was ready to relinquish all of its rights and privileges to the territory of Jiao Zhou and the Shantung Peninsula in China.

*Russia and Russian states.* Germany would not claim any territory that belonged to the Russian Empire on 1 August 1914. It considered the issue of constitutional order and independence of former Russian territories to be their internal affair. Germany renounced the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk when the armistice was made on 11 November 1918. However, no one could expect Germany to restore and rectify Russia's previous rights. Germany could not recognise any allied treaties with the territories of the former Tsarist Empire in the interests of friendly relations with Russia or individual parts of the former Tsarist Empire. Germany wanted to live in peace and friendship with all its eastern neighbours.<sup>17</sup>

3. German rights and interests outside Germany, foreign trade and maritime navigation. Germany needed maritime transport for foreign trade, import of food and raw materials, export of goods and improvement of its balance of payments. To do so, it needed its own naval fleet and free

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17 *Akten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945.* Serie A: 1918-1925. Band II. 7. Mai bis 31. Dezember 1919. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984, 104.

access to seaports in Europe and other parts of the world. Therefore, it could not waive its original rights, privileges, and concessions in international trade.

4. Compensations.

*Legal grounds of German obligations of compensation.* Germany had already evacuated its troops from the occupied territories of neutral and hostile states – Belgium, France, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, and Romania. In addition, it had to compensate for damage caused to civilians, military personnel, and hostile states during the war. However, the German Government considered that their claims should be significantly reduced.

*Financial payments.* First, it was necessary to accurately calculate the true value of the damage caused. At the time, Germany had an amount of 20 billion gold marks ready for this purpose, but the total amount could in no case exceed 100 billion gold marks.

*Economic supplies.*

*Ships.* Germany needed to have its own naval fleet to be able to meet the supplies of important necessities. It therefore called for a significant reduction in compensation in the form of the transfer of merchant ships to the Allies.

*Machines and more.* In order to preserve the economic sovereignty of the German nation, it was essential to maintain its own industry. It would be significantly damaged by compensation in the form of supplies of machinery, most of which were also privately owned.

*Coal.* The required compensation amounting to hundreds of millions of tonnes of coal was impossible for Germany to meet, as they did not correspond to German coal reserves or the production of German mines. At the same time, they would have required disproportionately high transport costs. In addition, Germany had to have enough coal for its own use.

*Chemical industry.* Germany did not consider it compatible with the principles of justice or decency to allow any control of its chemical industry.

*Cables.* This issue was not related to compensation and could be resolved in a different way.<sup>18</sup>

5. Economic and political conditions. No secret international treaties were to be made. Full freedom of navigation on all seas except for coastal waters would be allowed. All of the economic constraints would be

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18 Ibid., 110.

removed and a level playing field would be created for all the nations. All the economic issues would be resolved on the basis of the freedom and equality of all nations, not on the basis of the material interests or advantages of some to the detriment of other nations. No special interests of certain nations or groups of nations would be allowed to serve as the basis of any peace treaty. No associations or unions or special treaties and agreements were to be permitted in the common family of the League of Nations. Likewise, no special selfish economic combination or any form of economic boycott or discrimination would be allowed in the League of Nations, unless the League of Nations itself used economic sanctions as a tool to enforce discipline and control. Economic rivalry and hostility were a major cause of intolerance and a source of war in the modern world. It was therefore essential to ensure that any oppression that could result from an unjust peace was ruled out.

6. Inland shipping transport. Germany rejected international control of shipping on its rivers and waterways, as well as control of its river ports. Germany saw it as a violation of its own sovereignty.
7. Treaties among states. Germany had to conclude a 'collective agreement with the Allied and Associated Powers' to cover all the matters of mutual relations. However, Germany preferred specific and supplementary treaties with individual states on specific issues of mutual relations.
8. Prisoners of war and cemeteries. Germany called for an immediate release of prisoners of war and interned civilians, as well as the conclusion of a treaty on military cemeteries.
9. Sanction conditions. Germany considered the sanction conditions in the draft Peace Treaty to be unlawful persecution. It therefore called for the blame for starting the war and violating the rules of war to be assessed by an international court of justice the members of which would be representatives of all the Parties to the Treaty; Germany would have the same participation in the composition of this Court as the Allied and Associated Powers; the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice would be limited to ruling on matters of international law and the serving of sentences would be left to the national courts.
10. Labour market regulation. If Germany had not become a member of the League of Nations and its labour force and labour protection organisations, it would not have felt bound by its responsibilities and would have dealt with these matters through German labour organisations.

11. Liabilities. The fulfilment of all the conditions of the Peace Treaty was to be related to the long-term occupation of the German territory. Germany considered this a violation of the principle of non-violence in international relations and interference in its internal affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Tasker Bliss, the US military representative to the Allied Supreme Military Council and the chief military expert of the US delegation, presented an analysis of the German counter-proposals on 6 June 1919 in which he emphasised that Germany should be admitted to the League of Nations as an equal member since this was the only way to keep its military potential under control and to avoid the country becoming the focus of potential future military conflicts.

Nevertheless, Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Peace Conference, replied to the Head of the German Delegation, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Allied and Associated Powers on 16 June 1919 as follows:

1. Germany with its Prussian tradition was responsible for starting a war. Its aim was to control and tyrannise the whole of Europe and to suppress the freedom of nations. Germany started the war by invading neutral Belgium and terrorised civilians in the occupied territories. Subsequently, it unleashed an unrestricted submarine war with defenceless civilians, especially women and children, as its victims. The war deprived millions of people of their lives. The Allied and Associated Powers therefore insisted on the conditions of the Peace Treaty that had been presented so that Europe could be freed from Prussian despotism.
2. The Allied and Associated Powers sought to establish a new order based on the liberation of oppressed peoples and the demarcation of national frontiers in order to ensure lasting peace in Europe.
3. Resolution of territorial issues was linked to international control of inland navigation and the access of landlocked countries to the sea, which would have excluded the domination of any state over its neighbours and allowed for free trade.
4. The German delegation misunderstood the conditions of peace which were not intended to destroy Germany that was entitled to an adequate place in world trade. However, Germany had to settle all the claims for the damage caused.

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19 *Ibid.*, 111–115.

5. The amount of compensation was not to be determined by Germany itself but by the 'Reparations Commission' to be appointed by the Peace Conference.
6. The Allied and Associated Powers were to admit Germany to the League of Nations immediately upon fulfilment of the conditions of the Peace Treaty and renunciation of the aggressive policy that gave rise to the war. Admission to the League of Nations therefore depended on Germany itself and on the German nation.
7. The Allied and Associated Powers intended to use any eventual economic blockades solely as a legal means in the spirit of international law in order to put pressure on Germany to satisfy the conditions of the Peace Treaty.
8. The conditions of peace were not intended to legally settle the previous war; they were primarily intended to ensure peace, friendship, and equality among the peoples of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The German delegation left Paris in protest immediately after receiving Clemenceau's response. The Memorandum of the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, drawn up after the delegation returned to Berlin on 17 June 1919, contained the following points:

1. *The League of Nations.* According to the Allied and Associated Powers, Germany would be admitted to the League of Nations immediately after demonstrating goodwill by fulfilling the conditions of the Peace Treaty. However, the Treaty was technically unenforceable, so the Allied and Associated Powers did not envisage the accession of Germany to the League of Nations in the view of the German delegation.
2. *Territorial issues.* The principles of the Peace Treaty were not changed. They remained identical for Belgium, Luxembourg, Saarland, Alsace-Lorraine, and German Austria, as well as for West Prussia, Gdansk, East Prussia, Memel, Pomerania, and Silesia. Poland was to annex German territories, with just promises to provide a rail link with East Prussia. Denmark was also to exclusively receive German territory in Schleswig. The colonies were taken away from Germany without any compensation and settlement of pre-war debts and without ensuring the security of the Germans inhabiting some German overseas territories. The con-

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20 SCHELLE, Karel: *Erster Weltkrieg und die Pariser Friedenskonferenz*. München, GRIN, 2009, 100; PROKŠ (2016) op. cit. 194.

- ditions for Germany's relations with Russia and with the newly created states in the territory of the former Tsarist Empire were not changed.
3. *German rights and interests outside Germany.* At the time, Germany had no licences at all for foreign trade and shipping. Also, nothing had changed regarding its bills of exchange (receivables) and foreign investment. Germany's foreign assets were practically confiscated, especially in the German colonies and in the territories belonging to Belgium and France. Mitigation applied only to areas in the newly created countries in the east – in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and also in Denmark.
  4. *Compensations.* Article on Reparations No. 231 had been maintained despite Germany's inability to pay the amount requested. At the same time, reduction of this amount by the value of the previously confiscated ships and cargo had been refused.
  5. *Trade and political conditions.* The possibility of Germany's reintegration into world transport was ruled out. It was clearly an attempt by the enemy to catch up with Germany's economic lead from pre-war times. Rejecting the promise of equal participation of Germany in the League of Nations and its trade and transport organisations also served this purpose. German industrial and trade recovery was thus built on uncertain foundations for an indefinite time period.
  6. *Occupied territories.* All the natural economic and transport relations with the occupied areas of Germany had been severed. The enemies had introduced a special customs regime there which was intended to serve the permanent political secession of the Rhineland.
  7. *Legal issues.* German private property, which the enemies even intended to use to cover war compensations, was not observed in those occupied territories.
  8. *Transport issues.* Germany was still unable to manage its inland waterway transport. Enemy interventions against German rail transport tariffs still continued. In order to access the occupied territories and East Prussia, Germany requested: appointing its own representative on the River Oder (Odra) Transport Commission; the same in the Danube Transport Commission; it was necessary to ensure that the enemies could not unilaterally order the construction of the Rhine-Danube waterway.
  9. *Treaties among states.* Germany already cancelled all the treaties it had made with Russia, Romania, and with its allies during the war. All the rights granted by Germany to hostile, allied, and neutral states before the war was to remain without reciprocity.

10. *Prisoners of war.* Germany released all the prisoners of war, expecting the same approach from the enemy.
11. *Military issues.* Germany was willing to limit its own military force in the spirit of general disarmament, but solely on the basis of equality.
12. *Sanctions.* Germany demanded from the enemies a definitive list of persons, political and military representatives to be handed over for punishment. Germany would not be willing to extradite any more people.
13. *Labour law.* Germany repeatedly stated that it was ready to make international commitments on labour law, if it became a member of the relevant international organisations. Otherwise, Germany would ensure the resolution of these issues itself, according to its own laws.

*Conclusion:* The German Government was willing to accept a fair peace according to President Wilson's Fourteen Points but considered the presented conditions of peace to be too harsh.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the Allies agreed to occupy all of Germany, if it did not accept the conditions of peace. Germany's political and military leaders ultimately agreed that a catastrophe threatened in rejecting the Peace Treaty, i.e. occupation and explosion of revolution. They decided to accept the conditions of peace in order to gain time and the possibility of political change in the joint reconstruction of Europe. To this end, the Incumbent German Government resigned and a new one was appointed, headed by Gustav Bauer. Hermann Müller became the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the day of the appointment of the new Government on 20 June 1919. In diplomatic language, this meant opposition to the Peace Treaty to be signed by the German Government that comprised less important figures than the previous one. From the German side, this was meant to reduce the importance of the Peace Treaty as much as possible.

The new Prime Minister informed Paris on 21 June 1919 that Germany was willing to sign the Peace Treaty, but did not acknowledge any guilt by the German nation for starting the war and did not comment on Article 277 (Accusation of Emperor Wilhelm II) for violation of international law and his being brought before an international court) and Article 230 of the Peace

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21 *Akten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945.* Serie A: 1918-1925. Band II. 7. Mai bis 31. Dezember 1919. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1984, 120-122. PROKŠ, Petr.: *Diplomacie a „Velká válka“ 1914–1918/1919. Kapitoly o dějinách diplomacie za první světové války a na mírové konferenci v Paříži.* Prague, Institute of History of the AS CR, 2014, 300.

Treaty (German Government's obligation to provide all the documents and data in the prosecution of perpetrators for war crimes). The next day, the Allies accepted the German proposal and invited the representatives of Germany to sign the Peace Treaty in Paris. The head of the German delegation immediately objected that Germany was to accept and sign an unfair peace treaty that affected the honour of the German nation and Germany was forced to sign such treaty by the threat of a forcible attack on the German nation.

Representatives of the Allies and Associated Powers (including Czechoslovakia) and representatives of Germany (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Transport) signed the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. Accordingly, Germany was obliged to cede Alsace-Lorraine to France; Eupen-Malmünd district to Belgium; the region of Hlučínsko (Hultschiner Ländchen) to Czechoslovakia; Pomerania, West Prussia and Greater Poland; the plebiscite was to decide on the affiliation of Upper Silesia and selected areas of East Prussia, as well as the destiny of Schleswig. Gdansk became a free city under the patronage of the League of Nations. The latter was also to administer Saarland incorporated during that time into a monetary union with France for 5 years. The left bank of the Rhine was to be occupied by the Treaty Powers' troops for 5 years. The Treaty created a demilitarised zone on the right bank of the Rhine to a distance of 50 km. All the fortifications were destroyed in it and German troops were forbidden to enter. The German colonies were taken over by the League of Nations which assigned them as mandated territories to France, Great Britain, its dominions, and Japan. Germany had to confirm the abolition of the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Peace Treaty of Bucharest. The German Army was reduced to 100,000 men of mercenary troops with a ban on general military service, its own Navy and submarines. The country's Navy was severely reduced. Germany was obliged to surrender a large part of its merchant navy as compensation for the unlimited submarine warfare and its consequences. Germany was obliged to supply a specified amount of coal to France and Belgium as compensation for war damage and pay the first instalment of war compensations in the amount of 20 billion gold marks for the years 1919–1921. The overall reparations were subsequently to be decided by a special commission. Germany committed itself to recognising peace treaties with its former allies, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey.<sup>22</sup>

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22 *Mírová smlouva mezi mocnostmi spojenými a přidruženými a Německem a Protokol*

The German delegation lodged legal reservations against the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, the essence of which was that the Treaty thus adopted was not a means of establishing a lasting peace, but was to give rise to other possible conflicts. The Peace of Versailles was considered a 'harsh peace' by Germany. Despite the harsh conditions, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles clarified the international legal position of interwar Germany, allowing it to focus on post-war reconstruction. The situation that arose in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s (the economic crisis, social divisions, and associated moods in society) resulted in Berlin's policy based on the restoration of Germany's previous position of power. Related to this, there was an effort to revise some articles of the Peace Treaty of Versailles and its gradual repeal. Today we know what no one had known at that time, namely that this would happen as early as 20 years after signing the Peace Treaty.

